

# 7 Racial and Other Antagonisms

I

IDO NOT KNOW of a single clear case in which two races of people have been in contact for long, without antagonism being the result. The antagonism can, of course, be slight, or extreme, or any degree in between. The ways in which it is expressed can also vary greatly in seriousness: as children used to chant, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." Even where racial antagonism is both intense and violently expressed, it need not extend to everyone on either side: there may be many individuals on both sides who are entirely free from it. Still, antagonism, rather than amity or indifference, seems to be the invariable *overall* effect of the contact of two races.

This is unlikely to be disputed, as far as the past is concerned. But there is no reason, that I know of, to believe that the future will be different in this respect. There is much reason to believe that it will be like the past. Racial antagonism is remarkably tenacious of life, even where circumstances are unfavorable to its survival, and where



the differences between the two races have become blurred with time, or even entirely imaginary. For example, even in Great Britain in 1988, the antagonism of Celts towards Anglo-Saxons still contributes something—no one could say how much, but certainly something—to the Gross National Animosity. From facts like this, we can infer how unlikely it is that antagonism will ever be absent in cases where racial differences are pronounced, or where circumstances are conducive to their survival.

Racial antagonism has been recognized as a fact, from time immemorial. It has almost always been regarded as inevitable, and almost never regarded as constituting any *reproach* to either side. But within the last hundred years, among English-speaking peoples, racial antagonism has come to be often called instead "racial prejudice." This fact should puzzle us. After all, English-speakers of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries had the concept of prejudice, and the word too, just as we have; and they knew as well as we do what the feelings between races usually are. They had any number of words, as we have, for the kinds and degrees of such feelings: "antipathy," "distrust," "fear," "hostility," "contempt," "hatred," "distaste," and so on. But no one ever spoke, in all that time, of *prejudice* in this connection, and anyone who had so spoken would have met with blank incomprehension. And yet now, we can hardly open our mouths on the subject of racial animosity, without this word "prejudice" popping out. (At least in public: even now "racial prejudice" belongs more to the language of public speakers and journalists, than to the language of ordinary life.) Why has our language lately changed in this way?

Part of the answer is obvious enough. The expression "racial prejudice" is a *euphemism*, and racial animosity is something for which euphemisms have become more and



more needed, as our century has gone on. In fact *all* our words for racial animosity are more or less euphemistic. "Animosity" itself is a very tame word for what Maoris nowadays feel towards white New Zealanders, for example. But who cannot see that it is in the public interest of New Zealand that those feelings should not be called by their right name? And who, remembering Auschwitz, will *not* seek relief in euphemisms?

Then, we English-speakers need these euphemisms even more than other people. For most of us have been, for an unusually long time, on the *winning* end, or not on the losing end, of every racial antagonism in which we have figured at all. That state of affairs is now visibly drawing to a close, and as a result we exhibit what might be called the Tolstoy-King Lear syndrome: having renounced the pleasures of power, we discover the pleasures of guilt. By contrast, I do not think that the concept of racial prejudice has yet made much headway among the Japanese, for example.

But there is also something else behind our neologism "racial prejudice": something less obvious, but more important, than its euphemistic character. To see what this is, recall what "prejudice" means.

When we accuse someone of prejudice, we are ascribing to him a fault which is partly intellectual. We imply that his attitude would not be what it is, but for some defect of logic or of information on his part; that an element of false or irrational belief, about the object of his attitude, has gone into the making of that attitude.

Accordingly, when we call racial antagonism "racial prejudice," we imply that the antagonism depends on some false or irrational belief about the other race. Now, this is a distinctly *cheering* thing to imply. For we all know that it is possible for false or irrational beliefs to be corrected. That,



after all, is one of the very things that *education* exists for, and which it often achieves.

Here, then, is the secret attraction of the phrase "racial prejudice": it cheers us all up, by suggesting—as "racial antagonism," for example, does *not* suggest—that it is within the power of education to remove racial antagonism. Every time we say "racial prejudice" rather than use "racial antagonism" or any other old phrases, we do a small but definite *socially emollient* thing.

## II

THAT RACIAL ANTAGONISM can be dispelled by education is not a new belief. In fact it is only one tip of a certain old and large iceberg.

The iceberg is the theory of the "natural innocence" and "indefinite perfectibility" of man (as they used to say). Its basic idea is that man has no incorrigible built-in faults, for the simple reason that he has no built-in *anything*, but is made what he is, entirely by *external* influences. Education is, on any view, the most important of these external influences, and according to the "perfectibility" theory, there is no limit to what it can achieve. Not only all racial antagonisms but *all* national, or religious, or class antagonisms are, on this view, prejudices: they all depend on false or irrational beliefs, which it is not beyond the power of education to correct, about the "other" side. This theory of man needs a better name: I will call it "Educationism," since that is both more accurate, and less embarrassing, than its old names, such as "perfectibility," or "progressiveness."



Educationism has come to us from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and more specifically from its Utopian wing. When you read Condorcet, for example, or Godwin, you are encouraged to believe that there is no human evil which education could not in time put right. Not merely all large-scale human antagonisms will be things of the past, but all broken hearts and wooden legs too, once education is put in charge (which in practice means, of course, once *Educationists* are put in charge). According to these thinkers, even the most inveterate of human bad habits, such as dying, or sexual intercourse, will prove to have depended on nothing more than prejudice, and will vanish in the light of Reason and Truth.

It is needless to enlarge on these absurdities, or on the political horrors to which Utopianism always leads. But to do the eighteenth-century Utopians justice, we should remember that they were not the first propagators of Educationism. They had got it in turn from the Greek Enlightenment of the fifth and fourth centuries B.c.: from the Athens of Pericles, Socrates, and Euripides, and from such Socratic disciples or companions as Antisthenes, Plato, and Diogenes. Happiness, the Socratic school maintained, depends on virtue, and virtue is knowledge, and therefore can be *taught*. We are still paying for this perilous folly, because these would-be educators of the human race have had the good fortune to be taken largely at their own valuation. And one of the signs of their continuing influence is the recent practice of calling racial antagonism "racial prejudice."



IT IS TRUE, of course, that racial antagonism is usually, or always, accompanied by false or irrational beliefs about the other race. That is indisputable, but uninteresting. What Educationists believe goes much further than that: they think that racial antagonism *depends upon* false or irrational beliefs about the other race. It is because they believe *this*, that they expect the antagonism to be removed, once the beliefs are corrected.

But I venture to affirm that the Educationists are quite wrong, and that racial antagonism always depends, to a greater or less extent, on *true and rational beliefs* about the other race. Common sense suggests that racial antagonism will almost always in fact be mixed: partly rational and partly not. But while I see nothing to prevent there being racial antagonism which was entirely rational, I am sure there could *not* be racial antagonism which depended *only* on false or irrational beliefs.

For, suppose there could be. Suppose it could happen, for example, that Race A does not at first hate Race B at all, while B hates A, but only because of false or irrational beliefs which it has about A. Then, unless a fluke or a miracle prevents it, B's hatred of A will issue in treatment of members of A, of a kind which will cause A to hate B too, and rationally hate B at that. This hatred will in turn (flukes and miracles again aside), issue in A's treating members in ways which will cause new, and this time *rational*, hatred of A among the Bs. This new and rational hatred will lead B to treat A in such a way that. . . . But it cannot be necessary to go on: you must by now have recognized where you live.

Notice that the initial state supposed here was one that is actually favorable to the pretensions of Educationists. The antagonism which existed at first was entirely irrational, and there was therefore no need for the *really* difficult educational work of disentangling rational from irrational



antagonism; and besides, the antagonism was all on one side. If education can dispel racial antagonism anywhere, it ought to be able to do so here. Yet we see that, even here, the initial state must, in the ordinary course of events, bring about a later state in which antagonism is not only mutual, but at least partly rational. Any more realistic initial state would lead to the same kind of later state, *a fortiori*.

The only *less*-realistic initial state than the one supposed, would be that in which there was no racial antagonism at all. Some ancient Educationists did in fact take seriously this idea of a Golden Age or paradise in the past. As a result, they had to postulate some catastrophe or "Fall of Man," in order to account for the lamentable later states. The Educationists of more recent centuries have had no such "Fall" problem, for the simple reason that they all place their Golden Age in the future: with how much plausibility, we have just seen something of.

I say, then, that there is no such thing as a *groundless* racial antagonism; since, if there ever were such a thing, it would itself promptly create *real* grounds for racial antagonism.

It does not follow, from the impossibility of a groundless racial antagonism, that all such antagonisms are *equally* rational: it does not follow, and it is quite obviously not true. Race A's final antagonism towards Race B might be (say) 60 percent rational and 40 percent not, while B's final antagonism towards A might be 30 percent rational and 70 percent not. Every combination of this kind is possible, except one which assigns the value zero-rationality to the final antagonism on either side.

Nor does it follow, from the thesis that racial antagonisms are never groundless, that they are always morally justified. It does not even follow that any racial antagonism is ever morally justified. It should be obvious, in fact, that my thesis



concerns only the *causation* of racial antagonism, not its moral justification. All it says is that the part played, in causing racial antagonism, by true and rational beliefs about the other side, is never nil. This proposition is as devoid of moral consequences, as the proposition that the part played by gravity in causing road-accidents is never nil.

## IV

MY "A" AND "B," a moment ago, were races, but it will be obvious that they might just as well have been nations, or social classes, or popular religions. My argument about races holds equally good for any two large and enduring groups: antagonism between them, even if it began by being groundless, would never remain groundless for long. I therefore believe, quite generally, that there is no such thing as a groundless social antagonism.

When, therefore, you hear or read of the wrongs of Ireland, the oppression of Negroes or Jews or Catholics, the injuries France has endured at the hands of Germany, or *vice versa*, the crimes of the rich against the poor, or *vice versa*, the sufferings men have inflicted on women, or *vice versa*, the sins of the old against the young, or *vice versa*—*believe* it: it is *sure* to be essentially true.

Of course many of the details are likely enough to be false, but the general complaint, that there are true and rational grounds for animosity, is certain to be true, whoever makes it. The wrongs suffered may not be equally grievous on both sides, or equally longstanding, or equally widespread. But that they exist, you will believe, if you are rational.



Believe it, and *forget it*: "divide through" for it, since it is a factor common to all social antagonisms. At least, you must divide through for it, if your object is to justify the giving of special sympathy or (for example) compensation, to just one side of the antagonism. What is common to both sides cannot justify the preferential treatment of one.

No one needs to be taught this more than our contemporary journalists. Some of these people are so foolish as to imagine that they need only discover a group of people who have suffered some wrong in order to justify special consideration for those people. Since any group whatever is certain to be able to point out to a journalist some such wrong, nothing could be more fatuous; or better suited to provide journalists with a permanent supply of work.

"Victims of discrimination," the journalists call such people nowadays. Discrimination, forsooth! As though the most fortunate human beings ever born were not discriminated against, consciously or otherwise, every hour of their lives, by someone or other, because of something or other! Because of being female, or because of being male; because of being clever, or because of being stupid; because they were ugly, or because they were not; because of being poor, or rich; because they were young, or old; because they were short, or tall; . . .

## V

OUR SPECIES is certainly more "plastic" to external influences than pigeons or leopards or any other animal, and we are, therefore, the species to which education can make the greatest difference. This is the grain of truth in



Educationism. Exactly *how* plastic we are, and hence exactly how much education could in principle change us, no one can say with certainty. But it is certain enough that Educationists have been, for centuries, exaggerating the possibilities, which education holds out, of changing human beings for the better.

Konrad Lorenz said somewhere that he would turn Behaviorist when, but not before, pigeons were taught to copulate upside-down. I would set the price a good deal higher than that. I will turn Educationist when, but not before, three-months-old humans are taught to accept a steady diet of petrol, with the same freedom from "prejudice" as they accept mothers' milk. All the education in the world will never for long prevent most humans from defending territory, making a place to live in, mating, raising offspring, and so on, any more than education will prevent kookaburras from doing so.

Some present-day Educationists, it is true, have been consistent enough, or desperate enough, to maintain that even the normal direction of sexual interest is entirely an artifact of education. But even if we could believe this about our own species, it is evidently ascribing far too much to the education-systems of our four-footed and our feathered friends. We might have conspired to discriminate in the schools against homosexuality, but the kookaburra, kangaroo, etc., can hardly be supposed to have been in the plot.

If anything could educate Educationists, it would be a spectacle like that mortal storm of antagonisms which is present-day Beirut [1988]. Can any rational person believe that more schools and universities there would *help*? In fact, of course, they would only replicate, or (more likely) aggravate, the surrounding antagonisms.



Suppose we *did* install some of our Educationists in Beirut tomorrow, and gave them every support that goodwill, expertise, and money could furnish. What would happen? The very first message back would be, "We find we need to educate *the parents*, too (and therefore need more staff and money)." The next one would be, "We find we need to educate *the wider*

*community*, too (and therefore need more staff and money)." The next would be, "We find we need to educate the *international community*, too (and therefore, etc.)." In short, we would have yet another experimental illustration of the falsity of Educationism, accompanied by self-serving protestations that the experiment had not been fairly tried. Even when their schools and universities lay in rubble, the Educationists would still be found protesting that if only a *little* more money had been forthcoming to help them combat prejudice, . . .

This story is *true*: only the dates have been changed. Western Educationists were in fact out in force in Lebanon from at least 1850 up to a few decades ago. They reached the height of their influence, such as it was, soon after the Second World War, when there was for a time an American University of Beirut. Of course this university succumbed long ago to the political, religious, and racial antagonisms which surrounded it. Say instead—if you find you really cannot help talking this way—that it succumbed to political, religious, and racial "prejudice." But the only *rational* conclusion to be drawn, from this case as from a million others, is that social antagonisms are simply not, as a rule, removable by education. Unfortunately, nothing ever educates Educationists.



# VI

A FOOLISH BELIEF, then, lies behind the twentieth-century neologism "racial prejudice": the belief that education can dispel racial antagonism. But in the last decade or so, "racial prejudice" has been superseded in its turn by an expression even more foolish: "racism." This is, in fact, one of those words which are so perfectly foolish that they are valuable as diagnostics: no sensible person *ever* uses them, except in quotation marks. (There have been many such words: "spiritualism" used to be one, and "Scientology" is a more recent example.)

"Racism" is a neologism so recent that it was still not in *The Oxford English Dictionary* as late as 1971. But it swept all before it once it did arrive. Nowadays, you cannot open a daily paper or a popular periodical without meeting it. You wonder how journalists could possibly have managed without this word until recently. A politician must now neglect no opportunity to pronounce a curse on "racism." He can probably still remember the very first time he heard the word, yet he must now pretend that he had always had "racism" on his curse-list. Almost certainly, his real feelings towards people of other races are no warmer than those of most of the voters; but he must pretend otherwise, and pronounce the ritual curse whenever a chance to do so presents itself.

A more farcical spectacle than this is not easily imagined. Daniel Defoe said that around 1700, most Englishmen were ready to fight to the death against Popery, without knowing whether Popery was a man or a horse. But the spectacle which we present is even more comic, and much less honest. Almost everyone unites in declaring "racism" false and detestable. Yet absolutely everyone knows it is true.



"Racism" is the belief that some human races are inferior to others in certain respects, and that it is sometimes proper to make such differences the basis of our behavior towards people. It is this proposition which is nowadays constantly declared to be false, though everyone knows it is true; just as everyone knows it is true that people differ in age, sex, health, etc., and that it is sometimes proper to make *these* differences the basis of our behavior towards them.

Of course, inferiority between races, like inferiority between any two other things, can *only* be in particular respects. Whether A and B are two races, books, building-materials or whatever, A cannot be inferior to B *sans phrase*: it must be so in some definite respect. It may happen to be inferior, of course, in *every* respect that one can think of, but it more often happens that, if A is inferior to B in some respects, it is equal or superior to it in others. This is true just as much of breeds of horses, or of makes of cars, as it is of human races; but it is true of human races too. And just as the inferiority of one breed of horse, or make of car, to another, is sometimes properly made the basis of our behavior towards them, so is the inferiority of one human race to another.

Japanese are inferior to Scandinavians in the ability to produce red-headed children. Scandinavians are inferior to African Negroes in the ability to produce frizzy-haired children. A Malaysian is almost certain to be inferior both in height and weight to a Maori. An Ethiopian is more likely than an Eskimo to have a physique adapted for long-distance running. Arabs are less noted for industriousness than Chinese are. If you are recruiting potential basketball champions, you would be mad not to be more interested in American Negroes than in Vietnamese. If you are recruiting people of business ability in Fiji, you would be mad not to



favor Indian Fijians over native Fijians. Any rational person, recruiting an army, will be more interested in Germans than in Italians. If what you want in people is aptitude for forming stable family-ties, you will prefer Italians or Chinese to American Negroes. Pronounced mathematical ability is more likely to occur in an Indian or a Hungarian than in an Australian Aboriginal. If you are recruiting workers, and you value docility above every other trait in a worker, you should prefer Chinese to white Americans. And so on.

Of course all these things are utter commonplaces, but that is part of my point: *everyone knows* scores, probably hundreds, of truths like these. Naturally, these truths can still lead you astray in particular cases: the most rational recruiter *might* still come up with a lazy Chinese, or miss a native Fijian who is a financial genius. But if this is advanced as an objection to what I have said, then it is trivial and silly, because such possibilities are already allowed for, by the *statistical* nature of the truths in question. *Of course* lazy Chinese, and the like, are possible: but the point is, that the probabilities are the other way.

Nor does it affect the truth of the propositions I have listed, if some of the traits in question are more culturally determined than genetically determined. They are still traits which are *statistically associated with race*, well enough, to make race a rational guide in such areas of policy as recruitment or immigration. It needs to be remembered that genes are a scientific discovery, and a recent one at that. They are the things, we now know, which *cause* racial differences; but everyone knew of the existence of racial differences long before anyone knew of the existence of genes.

Since everyone knows that "racism" is true, why is it that, in countries like ours, there are constant, belligerent, and



almost universal declarations that it is false? I cannot explain this at all. It seems to be often believed that, if you admit truths of the kind which I listed above, consistency requires that you try to murder entire races of people. I do not know what one can say of a belief as ridiculous as this, except that it is extremely ridiculous. Take my example of long-distance running, Ethiopians, and Eskimos. Like most other people, I am not a fanatical enthusiast for long-distance running. But suppose I were: would consistency then require that I try to extinguish the race of Eskimos, and multiply the number of Ethiopians?

Why is "racism" an utterly foolish word? For the same reason that "eastism" would be, if we had such a word for the belief that the sun rises in the east. There is no need for a word, and therefore no usefulness in a word, for a belief which everyone knows is true. Least of all is there need for a word which ends in "ism," since that has precisely the effect of suggesting that *not* everyone shares the belief in question.

If we are to have "racism," we ought also to have "healthism," for the belief that some people's health is not as good as others', and that differences in health are sometimes properly made the basis of differences in our behavior towards people. This would have certain advantages: all doctors, for example, would stand convicted *ex officio* of the crime of healthism. The disadvantage is that there are going to be far too *many* new words at this rate. We will need "weatherism" for the belief that the weather is worse on some days than on others, and that differences in weather are sometimes properly made the basis of differences in our behavior. We will need "climatism," for the crime of preferring some climates to others. For the crime (already notorious) of preferring one neighborhood to another, we will need "neighborhoodism." And so on.



## VII

WHEN YOU KNOW that a certain proposition is true, it is hardly ever a good idea to be always denouncing it as false and detestable. It wastes a lot of your energy, but even more importantly, it tends to paralyze you. What you know pulls you one way, while what you say pulls you the opposite way.

This has been the situation of all Australian politicians, in the recent discussions of immigration policy. They have all used up a great deal of energy, joining in the ritual denunciations of "racism." But, pulling the opposite way, there is their own common sense and knowledge, and also—much more importantly—there is a restive electorate. Hence their paralysis, and the dreamlike vulgarity which has characterized the entire debate. When everyone says what they know is not true, and no one says what they know is true, a blanket of unreality descends on everything.

Unlike the politicians, our journalists have no restive electorate to set limits to their absurdities. The recent discussions about immigration have therefore furnished them with an opportunity to indulge their anti-"racist" passion virtually without restraint. As a result, some journalists have aired ideas about immigration which are far more grotesque than any that a politician could afford. I will give two examples.

In Sydney there is a radio-journalist who does a talk-back show on one of the commercial stations. In recent conversations she has more than once raised, and seemed at a loss to answer, the amazing question: 'What right have we got to prevent *anyone* from coming to Australia?' (I put the question in single quotation marks, because I may not have got her words *exactly* right; I did not hear these



conversations, but a reliable friend, who did, recalls the words as being those above.)

The second example is from a journalist who hosts a television show on the Sydney national channel. In a recent interview (reported in *The Newcastle Herald* of 23 August 1988), she said: "I see the world as the one place. It's neanderthal for people to sit in their particular caves, and say, this is mine." She is dead against prejudice, and (of course) is an ardent educationist. "I get angry at any sort of prejudice against any sort of people. We [i.e., the unprejudiced] are the lucky ones. God has given us this gift to educate the rest of humankind, and that's pretty special."

The radio journalist lives in Australia, and also lives, no doubt, in some kind of flat or house. She would not ask on radio what right she has to prevent anyone from coming to her flat or house. Why? Well, obviously, because she would recognize that as being an act of self-destructive folly, amounting almost to madness. But she does not mind asking on radio the corresponding question about her country.

Likewise the television journalist. As the quotations above show, she is against anyone' calling *any* place their own; so she is telling us Australians, for example, that we should not call Australia *our country*. This is kind of her, but I doubt if it is consistent. For I think she would know the right way to behave if, for example, thirty friends of P. W. Botha turned up at her flat, and told her that she could not call the flat *her flat*: that the flat is each of theirs, quite as much as it is hers.

Coming from anyone, the remarks I have quoted would be amazing specimens of folly and irresponsibility. Coming, as they do, from people in positions of influence, they are worse. Yet it is unlikely that they have injured their popularity; indeed, I would be surprised if they have not had



the opposite effect, at least among journalists. Anti-"racism" is now the *saving* grace: if you have that, there is no possible folly or irresponsibility that will not be forgiven you, and even counted to your credit, by journalists.

Such remarks as I have quoted from journalists, and the paralysis of our politicians on the subject of immigration, are historical phenomena which are so bizarre that they suggest a nation afflicted with suicidal mania: death-by-immigration being the method adopted. It is, clearly, the most atrocious "racism" on our part, to admit only a measly hundred thousand migrants a year, and to murmur against a single Japanese city being built here. Why don't we have a hundred thousand migrants every month, and a Japanese city every seventy miles?

That is, on all present indications, either what we now want, or at least what we are going to get: Australia as the new Manchukuo. This prospect reminds me of some lines of a great poet [John Dryden]:

By ancient prophecies, we have been told,  
Our land shall be subdued by one more old.  
And see—that world already hither come.  
If these be they, we welcome then our doom.  
Their looks are such that mercy flows from thence,  
More gentle than our native innocence.  
By their protection let us beg to live,  
They come not here to conquer, but forgive.